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United for Quality Care

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Hartford

District 1199NE

Before the Appropriations Committee

Good Afternoon Senator Osten, Representative Walker, and Members of the Committee, my name is Annak McCalla. I am a Certified Nurses Aide at Chestnut Point in Windsor. I have been employed at my facility for 10 years. I started my career in the Housekeeping department and advanced to a Certified Nurses Aide position. I am here today to ask for help with the ongoing staffing crisis within long term care.

My co-workers and I have seen the staffing issues increase throughout the years, however, the pandemic has escalated our situation beyond words. Prior to Covid there had not been enough staff, never mind during Covid outbreaks and where we are today. It is disheartening that I chose to advance to become a CNA, but I wanted to help our residents. Our residents in this State deserve quality care. The care that our residents are currently receiving is far from quality.

A typical day consists of assisting with: washing, bathing, grooming, dressing, toileting, and serving meals of which many cannot eat without being fed. Things that we all take for granted in our lives because we are able to do them for ourselves. The residents we care for today are not the same kind that we cared for 10-20 years ago. Today, patients are being released early from hospitals due to overflow. These patients need more extensive monitoring and rehabilitation. We are dealing with substance abuse and mental illnesses of residents at a much younger age. These residents are so complex and time consuming because many have behavioral issues.

After the first wave of Covid, our census dropped. Elective surgeries were put on hold and families were afraid to send their loved ones to long term care facilities, in fear of never seeing them again. Our company held a massive layoff instead of taking the advice of our Union to furlough workers. When hospitals started to reschedule elective surgeries and the company started to accept admissions, we had limited staff. The workload became unbearable. Workers decided to leave. Those close to retirement, retired. Many left to go pursue jobs that were offering more money for less back breaking work. Instead of recruiting new employees, the company resorted to bringing in pool agency staff. These agency workers are being paid well above our highest paid worker wages. It is a slap in the face to only make \$16.50 an hour and hear that these agency workers are being paid \$25-\$30 an hour, when the company supposedly doesn't have the money. Many of my co-workers, including myself, went to apply at these agency companies in our area. If our company was willing to pay agency workers this type of wages and not their own workers, then why wouldn't we leave?

The nursing home facilities in this State need to recruit more permanent help, not only in the Nursing department, but in all the departments. The only way to do that is to increase wages

and benefits, and create incentives to do this kind of work. In addition, nursing home operators need to be held accountable for staffing. We are tired of hearing them say, “There is nothing that we can do.” This cannot continue on with the large population of Baby Boomers needing care. This situation needs to be dealt with now.

Thank you for your time.